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Vol. 98 No. 1

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since 1869

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letter from the editor

You hold in your hands a living entity. Rooted within the soil of Santa Clara University, Santa Clara Review now thrives as an independent body within the literary world. In this realm, annual success is commonly defined by enhanced readership. In the natural world however, a year's success is marked by a different kind of growth. Consider the rings within a gnarled tree. Each arching line indicates a year of fulfilled purpose. This volume's first issue represents another year's growth that both changes and strengthens the Review.

As we completed this year's work, another image came to mind. I thought of the effect created by a single stone falling into gentle water, setting off halos rippling outward. In time each ring re-merges into its source. In that sense, this Santa Clara Review belongs with all those that preceded it. It is both new and still connected to what has gone before.

What's new? We are continuing to move forward by introducing our newly redesigned website: www.santaclarareview.com allows artists to submit their works without effort. This volume for the second time proudly presents a music section, which contains the band members' biographies, and their audio files will be available on our website. Within the issue you will find a wealth of diversity: a poem about bowls, a play about death, a story about remembering the small things, a charcoal drawing of a president, a fine piece of funk-rock, and much more.

Though we move forward in many ways, our goal remains constant. We have filled these pages with beautiful art displaying the complexities and contradictions of life. We hope this issue evokes or changes something within you, if only a little. May these pieces reaffirm belief or inspire new thought, enjoy what lies ahead.

Joshua Fredkin
and the *Santa Clara Review* editors



Small Things

I sit on the couch sharing a bowl of vanilla ice cream with my boyfriend, memoirs on anorexia stacked on a pillow beside me. It still feels funny, to read other girls' stories and see myself in them, the mirrors and constant pinching of thighs, the indescribable cold, the numb sort of loneliness. The surreal sense that everyone else is crazy but you.

It's the small things you remember: scrambled egg hidden between folds of napkin and glasses of orange juice poured down the drain. The mail scale that you used to weigh portions of cereal and rice, your fear of restaurants and of people. You remember the way it felt to finger your hipbones beneath cotton shirts and the cold rubber of the bathroom scale, strands of hair loose on your white pillowcase, the lies. You remember screaming at your 9-year-old sister and watching her cry.

Then, the brief specific memory: sitting alone in the library at lunch, shivering. Your back hurts because there are bruises all along your spine where the bones rub against the wooden chair. You bury your head behind a stack of chemistry textbooks and English novels, sipping ice water because you're afraid to walk to the snack bar and you've read that the cold increases metabolism. You want more than anything, to disappear.

No one knows what happens on the
mountaintop; they only see the shining
figure descend.

The frog squats on a water-splashed stone
holding his universe still.

A girl stands over him, lost
in the wilderness
afraid of death. She kneels

cups her hands around his soft body.
His legs scrabble between her shaking fingers.
She flips his buttery underbelly skyward
like a fetus splayed
presses her dull knife to his freckled throat
snaps it through. She wants to stop
to choose to starve to beg
forgiveness but if she does
his death will always lie behind her eyes
so she presses harder, cracking
windpipe, shredding tendons
for a long time horrible
until at last he lies gaping
and still.

She lays his legs on a rock
and watches them dry
and watches them
dry and washes her hands in icy water
looks up
at linen sky

at a hawk

at rainless clouds.

She rips his tough-tender meat from toothpick bones.

He tastes like a tiny god.

The Purpose of Some Ravens

Ravens come to roost,
talons deep-digging your lungs,
beaks jabbing to feed,
the flesh of your fresh grief
their necessary food.

At first you wave your arms
to fight them off,
but when their grip tightens
you let them have their way
and stumble through your days,
smile on your lips,
while the hidden flock pecks.

You try to celebrate:
a son's graduation,
a grandchild's birth,
Christmas with friends.
You chat and pretend to eat,
surprised no one sees
the birds at their dark work.
When the ravens' gritar rises,
you swallow or sound it
as strength and place allow.

One day you wake to find
one of them has flown,
sated for a while.
Yes, the next day it returns.
Yes, your chest cracks open to receive it;
you are familiar with the flapping
of wings below your breastbone,
your flattened breaths, yes,
even your need.

A Pill Named God

It was a small, windowless office, beige in the way corporate offices are, a shade designed to pacify and subdue, to keep the inner psychotic at bay. Tim sat in a low chair, waiting for Marty. There was a framed motivational poster on the wall showing a breaching whale. The caption read, "Through perseverance and effort, we can achieve the impossible!" Tim found himself idly wondering what the whale had hoped to achieve when the door banged open and a short, burly man hustled in and sat behind the desk.

"Tim," the man said.

"Are you Marty?" Tim asked. "They told me to wait for you in here."

Marty leaned back in his chair. He was wearing a silvery-gray suit over a black sweater. He had a heavy gold chain around his neck. His round face was topped by black, oiled hair. He narrowed his eyes and stared steadily at Tim across the desk.

"Tim, Tim, Tim," he said.

"Is there a problem?" Tim asked. "They said my checkup was fine."

Marty sat, looking at Tim for a very long time. Finally, he leaned forward and said, "Let me ask you a few questions, Tim. How is your anxiety? Are you an anxious kind of guy? Afraid of little things? Spiders? Women? The dark?"

"Not more than most, I guess," Tim said. "And no to spiders and the dark. With women, it depends."

"Black, tarry stools?"

"What?"

"Anger, how about that? Rage? Ever want to take some asshole out into the alley and just really give him the business with a two-by-four?"

"No!" Tim said. "What does any of this have to do with my health insurance?"

"I'm going to be honest with you, Tim," Marty said. "Cards, table, works." He fanned an imaginary poker hand onto his desk.

"Read 'em and weep, Tim." He started laughing and then stopped abruptly. "No, seriously. Mediwell likes you. We like you a lot. We think you could be a key piece to the puzzle here, our favorite client. We want to be on your team. Team Tim. How does that sound?"

"It's a terrible name," Tim said. "And I just wanted health insurance. Are we still talking about that?"

Marty leaned back in his chair again, his hands clasped behind his head. "I get it," he said after a pause. "Lone wolf. Soaring eagle. Rugged individualist. Man's man. Old-school pussy hound. I respect that. I love it. Made America great, guys like you. But here at Mediwell we know that even a lone wolf needs a wingman, am I right? That eagle needs his pack. I'm here to tell you you're not flying alone. We're here for you. We are Team Tim. Go Team Tim!"

"Stop saying that," Tim said.

"Here's the thing, Tim." Marty continued on without a pause. "There are some concerns. Some Team Tim morale issues that we have to nip in the bud. There are some whispers in the locker room, know what I mean? People saying that Tim isn't on board. That Tim isn't on the team."

"Is it even possible for me not to be on the team? I mean, I sort of am Team Tim by definition. God, what am I talking about?" Tim shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Look, there is no Team Tim. I just want to get some health insurance. And my checkup came up fine. Can't we just sign some papers or something and leave it at that?"

Marty leaned forward and slapped a vial of pills onto the desk in front of Tim. "Bam!" he shouted, loud enough to make Tim jump. "That's it," he said, leaning over the desk. "That's the solution right there."

"Solution to what?" Tim asked, leaning back in his chair. He could feel Marty's breath on his face.

"To everything, Tim. The fear, the rage, your little problem with the ladies. It's sitting right there."

"I don't—"

"You're not listening, Tim," Marty interrupted. "Those pills, those little blue-and-white beauties, that's it. It's all you need. Get Team Tim back on the right track. Go ahead," he said, leaning over the desk, staring intently down at Tim. "Take one. Take one now. You won't look back. I promise."

Tim realized, suddenly, that he felt desperately old. Somewhere, sometime, that feeling of youthful invulnerability had abandoned him, and now there he was, like a feeble, old Eskimo, stuck out on that ice floe, while Youth and Confidence waved at him from the shore. "Sorry, pops, we're all cut up about this," they would say, "but it's been a bad year for seals, and you're a luxury we just can't afford." He could see them, embodied as arrogant, young assholes, partying in Malibu, doing E with some bit-titted ingénue, maybe getting a little too wired, ending up grinding their teeth and watching the sun rise over an oily ocean while their dates gave blow jobs to some music producer with a great weed connection but still being OK with it. Because that was what Youth and Confidence did. And, in the meantime, Tim, his metaphors hopelessly confused now, found himself suddenly back in that horrible little office with Marty.

"This is insane," Tim finally said. "Or you are insane." Suddenly, it seemed that Confidence was back for an encore. "What is all of this—the pack of eagles, the hard sell, the pills? I need health insurance. That's it. Are you even a doctor?"

"I am a Certified Professional," Marty said, sitting back down in his chair.

"So, what is the deal here?" Tim asked. "How does it happen that I come in for health insurance and end up getting a big push for some mystery pills, and why don't I just get up and walk right out and leave you with your whale and your jewelry and your power furniture?" But Tim just sat there, because even as he was making his speech, he knew the answer to his question. Even more horribly, he knew that Marty did too. He was here because Mediwell offered ridiculously cheap health insurance. Health insurance that his shitty job as a phone center trainer, the job that had once seemed ironic and crazy, almost hip in its hilarious dysfunctionality, that job, the job he had to get back to, the job that had, he now realized, become disturbingly permanent, that was even now, horrifyingly, petrifying into a career; that job didn't offer health care, and it didn't pay very well either, and if Mediwell was really going to give him the coverage they promised at the price they promised, well, he was just going to have to sit there with Marty, the Certified Professional, and listen to everything he had to say.

Marty was looking at him, rocking slowly back and forth in

his chair. "Maybe I came on a little too strong," he said. "I get like that. It's my big fault. I tell everyone. If there is one thing wrong with me, it's that I care too much." He gazed up at the ceiling for a long moment before looking back at Tim. "Let me ask you a question, Tim. Why are you here? Wait! Let me guess. You're here because Mediwell has the best, most kick-ass, most 'I would let Mediwell screw me up the ass without so much as a drop of lube to get into this policy' health care plan in the known world. So, how do we do it? Ask yourself that. No! Don't bother! I'm there ahead of you. Got your back on this one, and I'll tell you how. Those pills. Do you know what stress does to you? It is like a Silence of the fucking Lambs serial killer. It'll rip your liver out, mince it, sauté it, and put it back in your damned gut like Martha Stewart. Heart pâté. Blood pressure flambé. So if we can fix that, give you a pill that makes you happy all the time, you're healthier, we're healthier. Win-win, my friend. World domination. Rocket to the stars." Marty waved his arm vaguely at the cosmos above.

"So, those things are an antidepressant or something?" Tim asked.

"More than that, friend. More than that. It's happiness. It's love. It's..." Marty leaned forward again, this time snaking low across his desk. He ended up almost prone, staring at Tim like a reptile. "It's...God," he whispered.

Tim realized that his thighs were starting to burn from trying to push himself away from Marty. "So, do I have to take them? You know, to get a policy?"

Marty sat down, suddenly businesslike. "Well, legally, we can't make you. But we both know the score. It's pretty much a one-way street. Take those pills: you'll never feel better in your life. Don't take them: go on like you have been, swimming around in your little pond of self-loathing, hating your crap job and your wasted life. You get sick, which you will, and we are going to drop you like a steaming dog turd. Anyway, here's the contract." He pushed a piece of paper across the desk. "Take it or leave it. Either way, the pills are on us."

"So, if I take that stuff, you won't drop me if I get sick?" Tim asked.

"Well, maybe, maybe not. That's for you to find out," Marty said. "Hey, we're in business here, right? And what's good for

Mediwell is what's good for you."

"How can having my medical insurance terminated be good for me?" Tim asked.

Marty looked disappointed. "The more money we make, the better it is for everyone. You know, the invisible hand thing. Free markets, rising tide, all the boats. Everyone knows that. It's Econ 101. So, are you in or not?"

* * *

Tim sat on the bus back to work, distinctly aware of the vial of pills in his pocket. Leaving Marty's office, he had vowed to drop them into a wastebasket or maybe give them to the chemically adventurous crowd that haunted his street. But something stopped him. It wasn't like he was averse to chemicals or artificial mood alteration. He had done plenty of that in his time. And it wasn't as though his life didn't need improving, or his moods, for that matter. In fact, on reflection, any improvement started to seem worthwhile to Tim. His girlfriend had recently left him, saying that she couldn't stand his dark outlook on life. This seemed unfair at the time, given that she was a thin, depressive goth girl who spent her leisure time writing suicide notes in the greeting cards at the local drugstore. And then there was his job. Tim worked as a trainer for a local call center and appeared to be the only person who could stand working there for more than six months. At one point it occurred to him that the main benefits of his job were that it was secure and predictable, and the biggest drawback was that he hated everything about it.

A big storm had come in during the afternoon, and the streets were cold and wet. The bus was packed with sickly and sniveling people, except for the back one-third, where some young thugs had spread themselves out intimidatingly, placing bets on whether the wino in the last row would vomit before or after 17th Street. Tim looked around at the red noses and sullen expressions, at the rain crawling down the bus windows like greasy, gray snakes. Without giving himself time to reconsider, he pulled the vial out of his pocket and swallowed a pill.

The next morning Tim began to wonder if maybe Marty wasn't onto something. Tim's body seemed somehow lighter and clearer, as if he were made of a translucent, flexible plastic. He couldn't remember the last time he had slept so well. His skin tin-

gled with thousands of pleasurable shocks, and his muscles moved him about with a fluid efficiency.

He blazed through the day in a euphoric delirium. Usually, he found everything about his work dispiriting. His company handled customer support calls for other corporations. Those corporations, as far as Tim could tell, spent all of their time selling merchandise that was often deeply disappointing, if not downright dangerous. This made their customers angry, and those customers then generally wanted to talk to someone about it. The people they ended up talking to were mostly recent immigrants with an ambivalent relationship with English. And it was Tim's job to load those immigrants up with platitudes and false empathy and send them out into that focus of American rage, the call center. Tim usually found the whole process pointless and deeply depressing.

Today, though, everything about his job was positively exhilarating. Tim spoke effortlessly, enthusiastically. "Americans are rich!" he heard himself saying in a voice much louder than he would normally have used. "Really, really rich. So when something goes wrong, we don't even care! In fact, we're happy; because that just means that we can buy something new. We love buying new things. So when an American calls you, they just want to hear that their problem can't be solved. That means more new stuff. This job is about helping. Helping and love. All damned day long. And you know what? You're going to get rich, too! Just go through your calls, 'Hello. You are a valued customer. We can't help you. Good-bye.' That's it. Happiness, money, love. Everything is easy here. Welcome to America."

His class stared at him skeptically. Finally, one of them raised a hand. "Yes, uh, Husna," he said, consulting his seating chart with astonishing speed. She was a thin, hollow-eyed Pakistani woman, and he found himself making a note to ask her for sex.

"If I may understand," she said, "this job is to tell people we have no help for them?"

"Yes!" He almost shouted this. He felt his mouth stretching into a manic grin. "That's all you have to do. Hello, sorry, good-bye. Isn't that great?" A part of his mind began to stir inside the euphoric cloud that filled his head. What was he talking about? He struggled for some new words, something different to tell her, but his mouth had moved on without him, and he heard himself saying, "God, I

fucking love this country,” and his lips split even wider, showing his class every single one of his straight, white, American teeth.

That night, on the ride home, he struggled to understand his new situation. He felt great; there was no question about that, but he was becoming more and more disconnected from his surroundings, as though he was swimming through a blissful fog, submerged in it for minutes at a time, only to emerge and discover himself in a completely new location, his body somehow navigating purposefully without his oversight. All in all, he decided, it was just too weird. He felt out of control and disembodied, as if he were witnessing the actions of someone else.

Later, as he was brushing his teeth, Tim’s eyes fell on the vial of pills. He decided to flush them down the toilet so that he wouldn’t be tempted to take another one. He picked up the vial, opened it, and made a motion to pour them into the bowl. But his hand remained stretched out at arm’s length, the vial upright and still full of pills. Concentrating harder, Tim tried to rotate his hand to spill the drugs out, but it remained motionless. And then, slowly, his arm bent, bringing the pills closer. He watched in astonishment as his left hand reached into the pill bottle, pulled out one of the tiny blue dots, and popped it in his mouth, while his tongue, completely against his will, moved it to the back of his mouth, where his throat robotically swallowed it.

The next day his body got him ready for work. That was the way it felt, as if he had less and less control over it. Tim felt increasingly disconnected from the world. His life seemed to become more and more episodic, as he would swim to the surface of the fog and find himself in a different location. He missed the bus ride to work, resurfacing in his cubicle at work. He was, he realized, in mid-conversation with Gladys, his supervisor. She was a thin and bitter woman of indeterminate middle age, angular in a way that seemed painful to the touch. “I call it optimized caring,” Tim’s mouth said. “It’s a brand-new synergy that maximizes client profitability while streamlining and optimizing the customer experience.” God, what was he saying? He fought to close his jaw around the verbal swill, pushing his tongue up against the roof of his mouth. His face hurt in an unfamiliar way, and he realized that it was stuck in a crazed grin. He looked warily at Gladys, trying to judge from her face what outlandish line of bullshit his mouth had

been feeding her while he was away. In the back of his mind, little tendrils of euphoria beckoned to him. It would be so easy, he realized, to let go, let his body take care of things, ease back into the fog for a while. He fought off the temptation and refocused on her words.

"Well," she said, "you are completely full of shit today, but somehow you got the whole boatload to perform like gangbusters."

"Really?" Tim asked tentatively. He seemed momentarily to be in control of his mouth.

"Response rates through the roof. They are blazing through their calls. Maybe you can keep your job for a few more days." She laughed in a half-choked way that suggested to Tim that she wasn't completely pleased by this prospect. Then Tim realized that, while he had been fighting with his mouth, his body was moving closer to Gladys. "See, that's what I'm telling you," his mouth said, reclaiming its will. "That's the Team Tim magic." He moved still closer, pinning her against his cubicle wall as she tried to back away. "What about you and me getting together tonight?" his mouth said. "You, me, the moon, the stars. WOW!" He had shouted this last bit. "That sounds awesome, doesn't it?"

Gladys slid sideways to his cubicle entrance. "You seem different," she said.

"Oh yeah," his mouth said. "There's a new Tim in town."

* * *

Tim's life became increasingly kaleidoscopic as timeless periods of euphoria would be replaced by brief glimpses of his life.

He was sitting on a couch with Gladys. They were in his apartment, but it looked dramatically different. All of the furniture had changed—his old, beat-up stuff replaced by angular leather and chrome things, creatures from the intersection of desperation and aggression. His coffee table—a sharp-edged metal and glass object—was so new that it still had its store tags. "Maniture! Soft where it ought to be, hard where it needs to be," one of them read. "A division of the Mediwell Corporation."

"So you know what I did?" Gladys was saying to him. "I superglued his hands to his dick while he was asleep. He walked around all hunched over for weeks. But he learned his lesson. No more Internet porn for him."

"You have beautiful eyes," Tim's mouth said as he moved

forward into the forbidding cloud of Gladys's perfume.

He was in a store, one of those androgynously manly gadget places filled with neon, stainless steel, and black imitation leather. There was a Mediwell logo behind the counter. "What do you mean my card doesn't work?" Tim was shouting at the cowering teen at the register. "What do you mean? What do you mean?"

He was at work, talking to Husna in the hallway. "There are a lot of amazing things about it, of course," he was saying. "But, mostly, it all comes back to size. Huge. Just huge." Husna backed away from him with horror on her face.

He was standing on the corner of a street. It appeared to be night. A man was standing directly in front of him. "That fucking mouth of yours is going to get you in trouble," the man was saying to him in a low, angry tone.

He was lying in a bed. Gladys's face was very close to his. "I saw you with her," she hissed. "I saw you talking to her."

He was back in the beige office with Marty. Everything was the same—the desk, the death-by-boredom beige, the aspirational whale. Everything but Tim. Something seemed to be seriously wrong with Tim.

"I don't mind telling you, you look like dog shit," Marty was saying. "You've got to take better care of yourself. What the fuck happened to your head?"

Tim reached his hand up to his face. It felt painful and swollen. He tried to speak, but his tongue remained unpleasantly immobile, as if someone had stuffed a dead slug into his mouth.

"Anyway, it really doesn't matter, because you have been a bad, bad boy. I mean, Mediwell will put up with a lot. People get sick, make claims on their insurance—you wouldn't believe the crazy shit they try to pull. Mostly, we look the other way. Because of the caring thing we got going. It's all about love for us, you know? But you've got to pay the bill. That's the bottom line. And you stopped paying your bills. Where do you get off stiffing us like that? Everything we've done for you. All we've been through together and now this. If I wasn't such a positive person, it would shake my faith in humanity."

"Two months?" Tim's tongue had begun to move again, but he could barely understand himself.

"Two magical months, Tim. And this is how you treat us."

"I don't remember anything. I think those pills turned me into an asshole."

"Oh yeah. Those pills didn't really work out. Unintended side effects. We discontinued them."

"What?"

"It's somewhere in all that paperwork. You should really do your homework. 'User may suffer from grandiose behavior, sexual compulsion, memory loss, financial impairment...' The list goes on for a while. But I guess you know about some of that by now, right? You wouldn't believe how the FDA got on us about those things. Fucking socialists. But hey, we've got version two lined up right now. You could get in on it if you had some cash."

Tim sat there for a few moments and then stood up. "Marty, you shit..." he began angrily.

Marty's hand reached out and punched a button on the intercom. "Security," he said, "we've got another loon." The door burst open behind Tim, and two uniformed men pulled him up out of his chair. Marty sat watching, his eyes twitching rhythmically, as if someone inside his skull was trying to send out messages in Morse code.

THE END

Japanese Lover

Now all that is left:

A comb—curve of ink, pretending to be hair

One chopstick—the twin buried in the heart of the ocean

Change—a few pennies, a dime, a quarter, refund for dreams

You talked of the desert, of how
you planned to bury things, let them
forget their way home.

Vestiges. You told me
this collection of
stranded, misplaced
artifacts was the world.

Gone the Glide

*Time has a gender...the first afternoons
of a love affair are some of the longest
in a woman's life...*

—Anne Carson

What was stolen:
Appreciation for the fleece
of mittens; satisfaction
with sketchpad and fresh
pencils; the tishit-kish
that a camera shutter makes.
I am stitched instead
to the clock's deadpan face,
smothered by the indifferent
telephone, shocked at the dump
overboard by what ifs
from that lovely canoe
called solitude.

Till Death

Characters

JULIAN	male, 40s-50s
FELICITY	female, 30s

Scene

JULIAN's study. A desk with chair, armchair, and reading lamp. neat.

AT RISE. JULIAN sits in the armchair reading a book. FELICITY enters.

FELICITY

What if I were dead?

JULIAN

I'm reading.

FELICITY

I mean it. I might die.

JULIAN

You will definitely die.

FELICITY

I might die before you. You think you'll die first, but I could die any day. It would be tragic: I'm healthy and young. But anything could happen: a random bullet from a drive-by shooting, a funnel cloud swirling with sharp debris, a fall from a slippery cliff when we're hiking in the rain.

JULIAN

Especially if I push you.

FELICITY

I'm serious.

JULIAN

You bought those new boots for the traction.

FELICITY

Still sometimes I slide a little. Wet leaves are slick. I could fall, break my neck, crush my skull. Even though I exercise three times a week, eat a high-fiber diet, and take multi-vitamins every day, I could die. My luck could run out. And then: What would you do?

JULIAN

I'd read.

FELICITY

Seriously.

JULIAN

I'm almost finished with this poem.

FELICITY

That poem will be around forever. I might not.

JULIAN

Okay. Fine. My wife is dying, so to hell with my book.

(HE inserts a bookmark and closes the book. SHE takes it from him and clutches it to her chest.)

FELICITY

I'm not dying. I just asked: what if I did? What would you do? Haven't you considered the possibility?

JULIAN

Would you mind putting my book on the desk? I don't want the cover to get ruined.

FELICITY

My hands are not sweaty.

(SHE puts the book on the desk, inspects her hands briefly, and wipes them on her pants.)
Plus I'd think you'd be grateful for any memento of me once I'm dead.

(SHE looks at the book on the desk.)
Robert Browning? That's a little macabre.

JULIAN
Are you on some sort of new diet pill again?

FELICITY
Meaning what? You think I'm fat?

JULIAN
I think you're high. If you're going to stay, at least sit down.

FELICITY
(SHE sits in the chair at his desk, at first tentatively but then as if it's hers.)
Here? I'm allowed to sit at your desk? It's so grand and important. But there's nothing on it to play with—no pen caps or paper clips ...

JULIAN
Your energy is distracting.

FELICITY
I haven't slept. I'm obsessed with my death. I asked you a question: What would you do?

JULIAN
I'd grieve.

FELICITY
And after that?

JULIAN
I'd grieve some more.

FELICITY

And then?

JULIAN

Then? Then I'd sell your car. And my car. And buy a Porsche Boxster S, two hundred and ninety horsepower, metallic Malachite green. And I'd drive it up and down the shore-line roads, looking for an unimpeded view of the summer sun setting on the sea, and when I found it, assuming you'd designated me as the beneficiary of your retirement account and life insurance, not to mention all those sick days you never use, I'd build my new domicile on titanium stilts, with glass walls, umbrellaed balconies, and pearly white floors. Then I'd retire from my job, take up orchid gardening, and marry someone sweet and young who'd let me read in peace.

FELICITY

You'd re-marry?

JULIAN

I thought you'd want me to be happy.

FELICITY

Marrying some stranger would make you happy?

JULIAN

Would it have to be a stranger? I was envisioning Lanie Rieves.

FELICITY

She's already married.

JULIAN

So am I.

FELICITY

How are you planning to get rid of Tom?

JULIAN

I haven't even figured out how to get rid of you.

FELICITY

I can't believe you think she's pretty.

JULIAN

I don't. I just assume she's good in bed.

FELICITY

It's hard to believe I once fell in love with your sense of humor, Julian.

JULIAN

That was a long time ago. Maybe you've changed, Felicity.

FELICITY

Maybe I've changed! Just look at yourself.

JULIAN

I still look the same as I did in college. I wear the same size pants.

FELICITY

Sure you do. Since the chemo.

JULIAN

Same size pants, same size shirt, same size hat.

FELICITY

You never wore a hat before the chemo.

(Pause.)

Julian, what are you going to do if the cancer comes back?

JULIAN

I don't know.

FELICITY

What do you mean you don't know?

JULIAN

I. Don't. Know.

FELICITY

You've already picked out your dream car and dream house and dream wife for when I die, but if your cancer comes back, you have no contingency plan?

JULIAN

Because you're not going to die. You'll live to be a hundred and four.

FELICITY

That's too old. I don't want to be a feeble, lonely woman surrounded by cats. I'm allergic to cats.

JULIAN

You're likely to outgrow that allergy as your immunity changes. You can have as many cats as you like.

FELICITY

I don't like cats.

JULIAN

I know. Neither do I. Didn't the doctor make you promise to believe I'd live forever? That's what supportive spouses are supposed to do.

FELICITY

Promise not to leave me.

JULIAN

I promise.

FELICITY

I mean it. I need you.

JULIAN

Ahah! She admits it. Porphyria worships me.

FELICITY

You're so romantic. Now what? You strangle me, like in the poem?

JULIAN

No, I trust you.

(Pause.)

I plan to spend eternity with you.

FELICITY

You mean we'll be buried together. What if one of us remarries? Then what happens to those burial plots we bought in Sedona? Do we make room for number three? I refuse to be buried with Lanie Rieves.

JULIAN

My nightmare's you selling your half on e-bay to a retired sumo wrestler. I'd have to spend eternity with him.

FELICITY

My mother ordered my father to re-marry. On her deathbed. She made him promise not to grieve too long, to go out and find a wife.

JULIAN

She loved him.

FELICITY

I can't relate to that. I can't imagine you with anyone else. It would drive me insane.

JULIAN

That's because you're not dying. You're beautiful, vibrant, healthy, and young. Your mother disintegrated slowly over time. She had time to think about death seriously. With gravitas.

FELICITY

If you married Lanie Rieves, I'd haunt you like Heathcliff.

JULIAN

That's my girl.

FELICITY

I'd come back as a crow, sharpen my beak, and peck out her eyes.

(Pause.)

Would you haunt me?

JULIAN

You mean if you remarried?

FELICITY

Yes.

JULIAN

I don't know.

FELICITY

You don't know anything.

JULIAN

No. I wouldn't. I would not haunt you.

FELICITY

You'd want me to be happy?

JULIAN

Yes.

FELICITY

Well I wouldn't be. I couldn't be.

JULIAN

Good.

FELICITY

Good?

JULIAN

I'm not really that noble.

FELICITY

Or you don't love me that much.

JULIAN

Exactly.

FELICITY

Which is it?

(Pause.)

You don't know.

JULIAN

I don't love you enough.

FELICITY

I knew it.

(Pause.)

I'd have pegged you for cherry red.

(Pause.)

The Porsche. Malachite green?

JULIAN

Metallic malachite green. Red's too obvious.

FELICITY

I don't guess we can afford one?

JULIAN

Not the S series. Besides, they're gas guzzlers.

FELICITY

And the house on the beach? I thought you hate sand.

JULIAN

In my fantasy, it's sand-free.

FELICITY

And Lanie Rieves? You used to have better taste.

JULIAN

That was a long time ago. Maybe I've changed.

FELICITY

And maybe you haven't. You're still reading the same old poem.
(SHE picks up the book, opens it.)

JULIAN

Don't.

FELICITY

You used to love when I'd read poetry aloud.

JULIAN

Please. Don't.

FELICITY

(SHE skims the poem, closes the book.)
It's grisly and sweet. Does it make you think of me?

JULIAN

Your hair's too short. Your eyes aren't blue. And you fidget too much.

FELICITY

So did she.

JULIAN

Not anymore.

FELICITY

Now she sits still. The ideal woman. She'd let you read.

JULIAN

I wouldn't be able to concentrate with a woman's head drooped on my shoulder.

FELICITY

And she wouldn't be good in bed.

JULIAN

You never know. Some people are into that.

FELICITY

Not much of a fantasy. Death.

(Pause.)

The doctor said your remission could last forever.

JULIAN

Honesty's more interesting. More refreshing.

FELICITY

Her eyes are laughing even after she's dead. She's fixed in her moment of bliss. What happens next?

(Pause.)

Do you think they're still sitting there, her cheek burning bright in the afterglow of strangulation? You could write "Porphyria: The Sequel." A narrative poem about a man and his fetish, part 2. What happens if and when said man comes to his senses? Or, better yet, what happens when the police come looking for the asphyxiated blonde?

(Pause.)

Or, better yet: I could write it. I'll sit here at your desk and pretend to be the poet. What if he's gone completely mad? What if he has no memory of what he's done? What if he can't live without her? ... What if she's not really dead?

JULIAN

Or what if he's about to die himself? His internal organs rotting with disease ...

FELICITY

And he can't bear to think of her in the arms of another man ...

JULIAN

Even though if he really loved her, he'd want her to be happy.

FELICITY

He's just too tidy to leave any loose ends.

JULIAN

So he ends her life just as he expects his own to end ...

FELICITY

Only then the old doctor arrives in the middle of the night, having braved the storm to deliver the happy news: The diagnosis was wrong! Our man will live! But then he looks at his love and asks himself, What have I done?

JULIAN

And realizes he's now free to marry Lanie Rieves.

FELICITY

Except that she's still married to Tom ...

JULIAN

And he'll be spending the next forty years in jail.

FELICITY

Unless of course capital punishment is still legal.

JULIAN

(Pause.)

Not much of a fantasy. Death.

FELICITY

It's forever that's the fantasy.

End of Play

Till Death was performed at East Haddam Stage Company's Plays and Poetry, 3 Oct.-2 Nov., 2008, at several locations in Connecticut.

The Wolf Yearling

The elk that eluded her as a pup
has been rotting in a trap for a year.

The lair she was born one April nightfall
was home to coyotes shot last summer.

She'll waver at the numberless campfires
before yielding to human redolence,

fur bristling in wind that carries their scents
as if to teach her how the dead survive.

The Harmonica

In his sweat-soaked ball cap and dingy jacket,
his hands quiver, curled fingers held up
to his mouth as if playing an invisible
harmonica, perhaps the best—a nickel-plated
Hohner—no less real to him for our lack
of seeing it.

His head shakes in continual nod
to a beat only he can hear. Some say
he imagines no musical instrument at all,
just whispers to his fingers some hazy
delusion.

Others claim he plays solos to a woman
so enamored of him, so beautiful
she takes his breath away even as she stands
on the balcony, listening as she smokes,
and never returns to bed.

Fall

Remember when you were high behind the house,
sat there threading smoke through your fingers
weaving your invisible adventure. I breathed in

thick foggy ghosts—and you
tapped ashes on the ground and cried
like they were lost friends, whimpered

when you stomped your dumb bare foot right through them. I
peeled
mildewed paint from the porch in painful slivers, patiently
like tallying days, until a patch was clear between us.

Reflections of the spark in your hand crashed
through dark hills. Bleary eyed you swayed
as the world began to spin.

Patricia

Seven times she thumped out one of us
into stewing American frenzy and fugue.
This was the Fifties, Sixties, her children
were citizens of empire, but those given
bread and entertainments not of their liking.
So much sense was spent on what made sense,
within our household and beyond its ramparts.
That full house had no alone in it, our father
filling all corners but hers, where we hid.

Behind him, the charcoal John Kennedy portrait,
and in front, his fury if plates weren't oven-
warmed just before Mom hauled submissive
gray food to the long table, him stinking of work.
She'd never eat, taking black tea, heavily sugared.
Well, good for her, we'd chew and chew for her sake.
Fish sticks like desiccated lizards, God help us, and
Salisbury steak, whatever that was, toughened lovingly,
disastrously gravied, to ill effect, and we fought for it.

Dad honed in on what conformity called forth,
but still demanded to stand out, so he screwed up,
straddling decades. Knowing all that Shakespeare
he'd declaim at supper, yet never reading anything
but the paper, cover to cover, keeping informed,
as though he might get pulled over any day now,
needing an answer, but having no questions, ever.
Once we were grown we could measure his terror:
TV a bright bruise in the dark, or a moon in cloud.

Mom reading in the kitchen, hectored past reason,
couldn't reason, not with him, wouldn't come sit
through loud insipid dramas, or what loudly

passed for laughter. Someone else could tend him,
bounce up to change channels, fetching snacks.
He'd bellow, she'd start without rising,
him laired in darkness, not leaving the siren glow.
We'll never know how hard she toiled alone
to be alone, to share this craft with all of us.

It's too late to have her over, with our own children.
Her tale is done, waiting to be warmed and retold.
He's plated on the couch, in thrall to bright clatter.
She shuts her Updike and turns to the big dish pile
beneath fluorescent future light, her many children
slipping past the screen door or off the low porch roof,
out windows of the foundering house, running under
the doomed, green brained elms, spreading out like water
or a rippling call to supper, into now, on, on, into later.

Bowls

I

Like rimless hats balanced over
For coffee on the cloth, wheel spun so
Narrowing obtains to width, are
Three circles between white plates.

II

A green opens the window doors
To variants of green. Stripes
Ride the fired sides. The
Walls are rose white, the cloth stippled snow.

III

Gray geese horn on this morning,
Umber smelling hour from coffee. The jug
Has a trowel handle and is
Chipped silver, hexagonal, blackened.

IV

The black circles of coffee shine
White. Everything's filled by what it is not
But speaks about: brown sugar in a white
Square and cream in a brown cow.

V

Merciful god appears nowhere
But there are three oranges, fiercely
Sweet in a white bowl,
Hand thrown, coiled white crockery.

VI

Just and merciful god is nowhere
And white roses make an absence
Perfect as the clay wound and rounded
Into a shape to fill with, at least, at most, light.

Poetry Excercises (Number Five)

1) Begin with a person, place or thing

Then make a thing like a place and a person like a thing and a place like a childhood memory

And make it all rhyme. Or don't.

Keep all comparisons under fourteen periods, thirteen commas and two and a half lines.

2) Compile a list of forgotten hugs and stolen kisses.

Rank them in order from blue to orange, and then set the list on fire.

What does this reveal about the human experience? Explain.

3) Write a poem about *DEATH* and make good use of imagery.

Colorfully describe the scraping **crunch, crunch, crunch** as the first maggot bores into your dead father.

Then, write a poem from Maggot's perspective. Write a poem about dinner.

What does it feel like to burrow into your father's skin? Use simile.

4) Write a poem about your soul as if you knew what the fuck you were talking about.

Pretend to be an expert on the inner hallways of your mind and, **under no circumstances**, allude to your own misunderstanding.

Take us on a tour of your psyche, but be sure to board up the junk closet or people will want to see what's in there.

Compare your mind to a baby manatee then throw it away.

That's just stupid.

5) Write a love poem.

Begin with fluttering feelings of excitement before settling into a comfortable routine.

End VIOLENTLY or just fizzle out but always end with a bitter what-if IN ALL CAPS!!!!

A Suitcase Full of Badger

On my tenth birthday Jim and I sat on the porch, watching summer clouds. We sipped cool lemonade from thick bourbon tumblers. Will showed up with a badger. He dragged it behind him in a burlap sack, the oily material pierced from within by demonic black claws and murderous growling. Jim said it was a sign. I said it was scary and they both laughed at me.

They slid it into an old leather suitcase, and we all carried it out to where the highway crossed deep cornfields. Will and Jim shook the suitcase up, each holding an end and bouncing it up and down before setting it on the blacktop. Inside, the badger was quiet, unmoving, either from concussion or a silent resolution to wait for its chance to rip us to shreds. We hid in the ditch.

After a few minutes, a black Ford coupe stopped and two big shots in grey suits got out. They looked at the suitcase, then around at the tall corn stalks. Jim kept mumbling, "Come on, just take it, nobody's looking."

The big shots talked for a minute. The passenger, taller than the driver, kept leaning in close to him, pointing his finger in the driver's face. I was getting nervous; my stomach was queasy, and I had to pee. Finally, the taller one thumped the driver on the chest and grabbed the suitcase.

I looked at the tall corn behind me and whispered, "Jim, we should go now."

The big shots climbed into the car. Jim didn't take his eyes off them as they drove away, shushing me from the corner of his mouth.

After about a hundred yards they slammed on the brakes and jumped out. The taller one flung the opened suitcase out over the corn. The driver pulled out a .45 and started shooting. He stomped around and fired into the surrounding fields until the gun was empty. I peed my pants. I thought I was doomed. I tried to run, but Jim shoved me down and held me there. He glared at me and hissed, "What do you think you're doing?"

I punched Jim in the face. "You're a fucker, Jim. You're going to get me killed!"

His nose bled through his fingers as he pinched it, a look of surprise on his face. He whispered hoarsely at me, "You're a pussy, Ben."

The driver reloaded and shot the badger in the front seat. I looked at Will, but he just shook his head at me, his face a stone wall. The driver pulled the carcass out by its tail and threw it onto the road. Its head was a bloody mess, chunks of skull hung from hairy strips of skin. I got up and ran through the corn.

Five Ways of Looking at a Cave

1. Nothingness

I think I know what it would be like to have no body. I sit here, perfectly still, my feet planted on the floor and my hands clasped together in my lap. For a short while, I can feel the cold of the metal bench seep through the worn fabric of my jeans, and my joined hands warm one another. The air is an unvarying fifty-five degrees, and if I think about it, I can feel the coolness on my cheeks and at the ankles where there is a gap between my socks and pant legs. Then nothing. The sensations dissipate, or at least my awareness of them does, and I no longer feel.

Nor hear. I hold my breath and listen. The white noise that is normally the soundtrack of my daily life—the rumble of passing traffic, the hum of my computer, the soft sweeps of wind—is missing: my world is utterly devoid of sound, and the lack of it presses upon my ears like water.

I lift my hand and hold it only inches away from my face. Again, nothing. My sight has been just as thoroughly dissolved as my sense of touch and sound. Fascinated, I wave my hand before my eyes, straining to see one dark shape against another, a faint outline, anything at all on which to focus my eyes. But no photon of light exists in all this space, and I am blind, buried some three hundred feet beneath the earth.

There is no sight, no sound, no feeling. No scent. No taste. For all my senses tell me, I have no body.

The perfect quiet is disrupted: noise strikes against my eardrums, like sledge hammer against rock. Someone is coughing.

Go away, I think.

The invasive sound has permitted others to begin whispering, cracking their knuckles, and giggling in their throats. The illusion of deafening stillness is spoiled.

We continue to sit in the dark as our guide begins to tell the story of a man who fell through a sinkhole on the surface of the

world and ended up in the caves. He had no light, no food, no water. Nothing. For hours and hours, coming on three days, he waited in the dark for someone to find him, afraid to move. In that same hollow space, I try to feel his terror. I try to experience the same doubt that would render me immobile and root me to the floor. Will moving forward take me closer to the sky or deeper inside the earth? What if another misstep plummets me down an unclimbable rocky slope, or what if I injure myself on a low-hanging rock?

What if I am never found?

Why does this thrill me?

The unfortunate man, in such perfect silence, had begun to hear his own blood rushing past his eardrums. He had begun to see shapes, hallucinations, tricks of the memory of sight, even as his eyes had begun to atrophy. His heart had kept on beating, his body had kept on living—in the nothingness of the cave, his body became real, vulnerable, perishable. I try to feel that. But all I know is the sensation of having no body at all.

The guide finishes with the man's story of rescue, and a startlingly audible click brings me out of my daydreams. The cavernous space is once again illuminated with a soft glow from the carefully placed fluorescent light bulbs, which are turned on only when a tour group passes through, to maintain the pristine quality of the untouchable calcite deposits, gypsum and dripstone formations, and limestone rock.

Though dim, the sudden visibility makes me wince. I look down at my hands until my eyes adjust once again to the ability to see, and I am almost surprised that I can distinguish the few colors within my vision: the peachy flesh of my hands, the pale blue of my jacket, the dusty gray of the cave floor. And with the return of light, any sense of nothingness, terror, or wonder flees.

2. The Story of Man

In a tour group of forty, maybe fifty, I try my best to stand apart and forget that I am being guided, that there is a designated path, that too soon I will stand in daylight and uncontained air. I prefer the end of the long walking queue, with a little distance between me and the others. Or, when we come to a stop, I turn my back to them and face the cave walls.

If I were alone, I would touch them. I would drag my hands along the walls, brushing free the dust and feeling every bump as it guided me forward, deeper inside the world, to discover what secrets were held in its underbelly.

To the unknowing traveler these caves are hidden. There are no mountains, no rises of land, no gaping entrances to suggest that there are hundreds of miles of tunnels and massive air pockets running through the earth's crust below your feet. That is, unless you know where to look for them. The people who came before me, long before—they knew. They were unhindered, sometimes solitary explorers, men pressed forward by the human need to wonder and discover. They had left traces of themselves behind: markings on the walls, primitive tools, and the oils of their fingers that turned white rock black.

The black rock is part of the story, the evidence of humans interacting with the caves. It is a story that today we are not allowed to share: our passing through cannot be told in the same way. Today, we do not permit casual curiosity to lead to discovery. One must have passion and certifications and degrees. Lacking the latter two, I must stifle my adventurous spirit and leave the work of wondering to the professionals, the scientists and sanctioned workers. I must travel the safest, well-trodden way and resign myself to being led. At the end of the tour, I will sign a guestbook and add my name to the millions of other *guests*, placing my name in a book that no one will ever read. That is my story.

Iron bars and grated staircases and professional guides remind us to keep our hands in our pockets and to mind our children. Stay back! That two-ton stalagmite took ten thousand years to form, and it is our responsibility, now that we've discovered it, to preserve its purity. Don't touch! Those five-thousand-year-old soda straws hanging from the ceiling in tight clusters, like creatures on the ocean floor, are delicate and easily damaged by human fingers. The guide frequently stresses the age of rock, the slow work of earth-formation, as if our interference with the world will halt it indefinitely. It was here long before us, he says. Won't it last, then, long after we have all gone? Why not leave a part of ourselves behind?

Its untouchability is maddening—it may as well be behind glass and I in a museum. But I want my presence here to last. Let

some part of me stay.

The lights clip off behind me as I follow the group farther along the path. Having lingered, I am now at the end of the line of forty bodies (but for the tailing guide, who makes sure that no visitors wander off the trail for a private spelunking adventure of their own), and for the first time I can imagine what it would really be like to be alone in the cave.

A small thrill tickles up my spine—for the adventure, though, not the fear. I imagine a lonely and arduous trial of survival and self-reliance, of fortitude of conscience and willpower, and of a heroic, even miraculous, escape from the depths of the tomblike caves. The impression lasts only a moment. My mind is too keenly aware of the others to feel any of the danger of true isolation in this place. As we walk, I try to hold onto that feeling, try to grasp at the terrifying fantasy, but the more I think about it the less tangible it becomes, like gripping a handful of sand underwater. Soon, that sensation, both terrible and wonderful, is gone completely.

3. Treasure Chest

Two thousand years before I ever set foot there, a Native American man entered the caves. It was late spring or early summer and the air was warm—he wore nothing more than woven shoes and a simple waistcloth.

After a breakfast of crushed hickory nuts and sunflower seeds, this man, who stood only five feet tall, lit a torch and ventured deep into the caves. He was a miner. Like others of his tribe, he frequented the caves in search of treasure: white crystals made from calcium carbonate. He collected them, chipping away carefully to separate them from the limestone walls and keep them whole. They would be used in jewelry and trade; they were his livelihood.

Over the years, the crystals nearest the mouth of the cave had already been discovered and collected, so on this day the man walked a mile or two, torch in hand, to a certain spot where he had come before, where he knew he could find more.

He searched, high and low, and the torchlight revealed to his probing eyes the tiny glittering crystals. They grew tight to the wall on a ledge, just beneath an overhanging slab of rock. The gap between the rock and the cave floor was only thirty inches high.

There was space enough, he decided.

There he began to dig. He scooted himself under the slab and began to chip away at the crystals. But he dug too deep. Perhaps he heard the breaking stone before it happened; perhaps, in that final moment, he realized his mistake and tried to scramble to safety. Whatever might have gone through his head, the six-ton slab came down, crushing him beneath its unbearable weight.

It wasn't until 1935 that he was discovered, still under the boulder, perfectly preserved. Because of the steady temperature and humidity, and thanks to the niter salt in the soil, his body never decomposed. When he was found, that two thousand-year-old mummy still had hair, skin, and fingernails. A treasure of humanity's past enough to excite any scientist.

The mummy, once encased in glass for the touring public to see, had been trapped for centuries in the veritable coffin that these caves are. It was taken away many years ago and now resides in a museum somewhere for the mildly interested to gawk at for thirty seconds before moving on to the gift shop. But in my mind's eye I can still see him wedged beneath the heavy rock, only his head and one arm exposed. Had he died instantly? Had he been alone? Or had he been with friends?

The latter possibility unsettles me. If he had had friends, what panic had seized them at the instant of the collapse? It must have been like watching a car turn over on the freeway or a tidal wave sweep through your hometown on the news—demise so real and so beyond human control. Maybe they had tried to save him. But their efforts to raise the boulder had proven futile, nor could they pull him free. Company at the moment of death must be a comfort only for the dying.

And so I choose to believe that he had died among friends. The story is still a tragic one, and yet somehow a little less bleak in that someone had known what had befallen the unfortunate man. Ignorance is as terrible as darkness, I guess.

I imagine their sorrow as the miners left the caves, one member short, to tell his family and the other members of the tribe. They had had no choice but to leave their friend in the dark, never to visit him again. Perhaps they could not remember the way back to him. But at least they knew he was there.

I stand near that spot where the boulder had ended the

man's life and feel my own mortality a little sharper. Hugging my arms around my waist, I press my fingers firmly into my sides and feel my ribs yield slightly against the force. How easily they would snap! In that moment, I can even feel the pressure of stone against my back and the solid cave floor against my sternum, and I know that death had been instant for the poor man. Thousands of years have passed, but I am glad for him.

4. Morgue

This place had once been a hospital.

In 1839 a physician by the name of John Croghan bought the caves for ten thousand dollars. He had observed the mummified bodies of Indians, as well as the furry bodies of long-dead bats and old wood that had not even begun to decay. Croghan determined that the cave air had some sort of a healing, or preservative, property. So deep inside the earth's crust, he constructed cabins and brought sixteen of his patients suffering from consumption down into the caves, believing that the cave air would heal their disease.

It is odd to see cabins inside the caves. The shingled roofs seem particularly superfluous. Each cabin is built of old logs and large, square nails. To me, they seem to stand shorter, squatter maybe, than normal cabins, but it may just be the low cave ceiling and close walls. Alongside the cabins are clotheslines on which hang old quilts and overalls; a rocking chair rests on a porch. The inner cabins glow faintly. Past each glassless window frame I can see an electric candle standing on a wooden table to light the interior, and on a faded red towel lies a loaf of bread beside a knife and a clay pitcher for water. An old-fashioned lantern, now powered by electricity, hangs from a hook above each door.

At first, the patients all claimed to be improving, and Dr. Croghan, thinking he had hit upon a cure, began drawing up plans to build an entire hotel inside the caves. But his enthusiasm was short-lived. After just a few weeks, it became clear that his patients were not, in fact, getting healthy again—they had only experienced a morale boost at the promise of recovery. When it became clear that they were dying, many begged to leave the cave and see the sunlight again, but he encouraged them to stay, insisting that it would take only a little longer before the effects reversed.

The experiment failed. Five of his patients died, and for a time the hospital became a morgue. Ultimately, Dr. Croghan admitted defeat and returned the remainder of his patients to the surface where, with time, the disease ran its natural course and each died. Six years later, Dr. Croghan contracted the disease himself. He died in 1849.

The ending of this story makes me smile. Perhaps it is the irony of Dr. Croghan's fate, or maybe it is simply because I do not know how better to react to stories of death.

I do not like to claim a morbid fascination with death—it does not seem healthy. But I *am* fascinated. Who can say that death does not prick basic human interest? I find a sort of amusement in pondering my own death, at guessing how it will find me, at planning how I will meet it.

Am I alone?

Am I in the dark?

Am I afraid?

The truth is, I want to know the unknown without coming to harm. I want to touch and to see and to feel the inevitability as something real, but this is not allowed. I cannot experience it directly, only peripherally. I listen to the stories, I witness others pass, and strain to see through the dark.

I cannot help but ask myself, what is the moment like? That instant of death, when life is no more and all that is left behind is an empty shell of what used to be *you*? Curiosity, I'm sure, is only natural, almost instinctive. One moment, you are the possessor of a tangible self, and in an instant you have lost it—you have no body.

Was death nothingness, like sitting in a dark, unexplored cave, unable to see or to hear or to feel? In that quiet moment, had I brushed against it? And yet, I had still been able to think. I had still been able to wonder about my nothingness and about myself. I had been able to remember the sensations of sunlight that made my eyes squint and water, the music that made me want to move my body in imitation of it, the vibrations on the floor that told me someone was walking into the kitchen.

It would not be enough!

I resist the very thought of nothingness, of memories existing separated from a body, of a being incapable of new experiences. The man who had lost himself in the caves, whose sight had begun

to atrophy, continued to hear and move. Perhaps this was closer—a part of him lost, but not all, and further discoveries yet to be made. Death, perhaps, is nothing more than exploring a little deeper into the cave.

5. Home

The metal staircase is long, and I ascend slowly, reluctantly. My head swivels from side to side, taking in these last images of tunnels, crevices, shadows. I am leaving unsatisfied. It had been too easy, this passing through.

Ahead of me, I hear the light tinkling of water, and I look up. I come upon a small pool, just on the other side of the railing. Water secreted through the surface had trickled down the rock and collected into a pocket in the stone. There was movement in the water, and I let people pass me by so that I could get closer.

As I lean on the railing and stretch my neck in order to see the pool, I shake my head, marveling. Simple, white lines undulate in the dark water, gliding seamlessly just below the surface, disappearing, and materializing once again in imitation of the slow pattern of creation. They are eyeless fish, creatures that, because they spend their entire lives in darkness, waste no energy developing eyes. For them, the cave is no tomb, but a home. It is filled with life, the kind that I never knew existed in this underground world. And it is beautiful.

The guide leads us back to the daylight, but too soon. There is so much I haven't seen, so many miles still left in the dark.

Do No Harm

I.

There is the early bird, then the worm.
First, even at this hour we are told,
do no harm. For the unfortunate worm
there is no mulligan, just soaking rain,
then beaks. In the safety of dew-damp trees,
early birds feast on the outcomes of harm.

II.

“There is safety in numbers”
implies that you, in the singular,
are prone to danger, as in leisurely
walks down dark alleys. Alone.
Nobody has ever been saved by pi,
rescued by a pack of integers.
Numbers that cling closely—
cholesterol, weight, my social—
all of which could heed the warning
from *first, do no harm*.

III.

“Objects in the mirror are closer
than they appear” was coined by engineers
then embraced by lawyers, one group
understanding *first, do no harm*,
recognizing the safety in numbers;
the other group adding the retort
“to [insert company name here]”

which led to “warning!” “caution!” and “!”
in attempt to save us first from ourselves,
the safety of someone else’s numbers.

IV.

He’s direct with me, even more so
in her absence. Hysterectomy. Proof
that we’ll be lacking in numbers,
requisite safety. This fact will soon
sink in, hit close to home, closer
than it currently appears. I contemplate
medicine, its preventative qualities,
triumphs, what ifs, and how do no harm
applies to the woman about to enter
the room. I stumble on clichés,
wondering if misery loves company,
if a good man is hard to find.

V.

Each day we die a little,
then a little more. This is harm’s
true equation, the continuous flow
of sand through time’s bottleneck.
Each blessing we count is a fraction
of the little that is lost, for which
there is seldom any blessing.

VI.

Hippocrates did not claim
it first nor was it his oath.
He hedged his bets on the idea
to help, or *at least* to do no harm,
which is far from first.

It is one way of worming out
of moral absolutism (at the least).
He preferred “early riser”
to the perfunctory early bird
for reasons ripe with speculation.

VII.

Hype is to hyper as hysteria applies
to the woman who has entered the room.
This was Hippocrates’ first, even if
misguided. I will be the good man,
committed to the *at least*, to do no harm.
What happens first or next is anyone’s guess.



annamarie leon |
charcoal and monotype
30" by 44"

Untitled



| veronica garcia
digital photography
5" by 5"

Inspiration Piece #1



melina ramirez |
colored pencil on paper
11" by 14"

Fringe Benefits



| carol collins
linoleum cut print on paper
6" by 8"

Silence



katherine white |
black & white photography
8" by 10"

Furbelow



| veronica eng
watercolor
4" by 6"

Scars



wendy crockett |
silver gelatin print
19 3/4" by 19 3/4"

Shopping Cart



| kellie flint
acrylic, feathers on canvas
32" by 32"

Made in Germany 1950-1967



julia weber |
chromogenic print
20" by 20"

Self Portrait



| armando portillo
ceramic sculpture
6" by 10 1/2" by 7"

Walnut



katie larkin |
black & white photography
8" by 10"

Coyote Valley #20



| craig scoffone
photography



kate bradley |
digital photography
8" by 10"

Portrait of Bill



| eric tseng
charcoal on paper
18" by 24"



clare nauman |
charcoal on paper
11" by 14"

Cliff Dancer



| patrick lydon
oil on canvas
30" by 40"

Distant Dice



Mark Arroyo, Joey Trombly, and Peter Do have been playing music together for over 16 years. Fed up with playing covers, they decided to form their own group and write original music. In August of 2009, the first incarnation of the jazz/rock group Distant Dice was formed. Jose Martinez joined Distant Dice shortly after, bringing with him rock-solid bass grooves. The band struggled to find the right singer, but after months of searching, jazz/pop singer/songwriter Jackie Gage auditioned and was a perfect fit from the moment she started singing with the band. Distant Dice is currently working on their first album and are also now booking gigs. Find them online, add them on Facebook, and check out their soulful and unconventional sound.



Distant Dice

Andrew Heringer Band

There are few independent artists who have driven the West Coast building a fan base as much as singer-songwriter Andrew Dawson Heringer has in recent years. Whether it is solo or with a full band, Northern California native Andrew Heringer has spread his blend of folk, rock and pop independently of any record label to thousands playing over 200 shows since 2006.

While studying classical and jazz guitar as a teenager, Heringer began to write his own songs inspired by his parents CD collection that contained music legends such as James Taylor, Bob Dylan and Tom Petty. During his time at the University of California at Irvine, Heringer released three albums with the assistance of his dedicated friends and collaborators. Since 2007, Heringer has booked two successful West Coast tours, sold over 5,000 units and released “The Paradise Sessions” as the Andrew Heringer Band, a six-piece Folk/Rock/Jazz/Funk group.



The second album of the Andrew Heringer Band, *Under California Skies*, was released in August of 2010. To record this album, the band reached out to its fan base for sponsorship and was greeted with an overwhelming response raising \$10,000 towards the recording costs. In return, the new album was released on the Andrew Heringer Band website for free and has since had thousands of downloads.

Spooky Island



Welcome to Spooky Island

reads an old wooden sign, slowly decaying after years of exposure to the brackish coastal air. Though there are many strange things about this island shrouded in mist, this sign is one of the most peculiar, as, until recently, the island had no literate inhabitants. One also questions its purpose, as the whereabouts of this island have remained undiscovered for centuries, its location known only to its natives, an odd people, whose deity is a blue colored misshapen bowl. A short time ago a group of young men happened upon this mystical place and, without much thought, decided to make it their stead. Was this a rash decision upon their part? Were they fools to choose such a place of mystery, a place so full of the unknown? Men are often quick to make decisions of which the consequences cannot be foreseen. Yes, it is a place of great intrigue, and one of immense beauty, but as they explore the depths of the island and of their own minds they may discover that this place is not as they once believed.

This is Spooky Island.

Dawson and Marie

Two local artists of the Sacramento indie/folk scene have joined forces on a musical collaboration that is far too charming not to love. Marlana Marie Sheetz and Andrew Dawson Heringer have taken a little of what they each do best to assemble a catchy and fun contemporary duo. What started as a joke, has now formulated into an acoustic singer/songwriter duet that simply cannot be compared to anything else sold in today's record stores.

Spring of 2008, Heringer approached Sheetz with the idea of producing an album for her. Without hesitation, Sheetz jumped at the idea and soon the project was underway. During the week of recording, Heringer and Sheetz began singing and writing songs together during their breaks. With all seriousness set aside, they decided to create a two man band solely for the creation of a MySpace page. The gag continued and they labeled themselves as "The Etch-a-Sketchers". The response was more than laughable; they found people had enjoyed their lighthearted tunes. The two considered the fact that this may not just be a silly side project. After a quick consensus, they decided to pursue a serious musical mission. They initiated a name change and soon after became "Dawson and Marie." Their first album is a concept album, revolving around the months of the year. Copies of 'Months Vol 1' can be purchased at dawsonandmarie.com, iTunes, Amazon and other digital music sites.



Contributors' Notes

jeffrey alfier is a two-time Pushcart prize nominee. His third chapbook, *Before the Troubadour Exits*, a collection of bar poems, will be published in 2011. He serves as co-editor of San Pedro River Review.

holly baker is an essayist and instructor at the University of South Dakota where she is pursuing in PhD in creative writing. Her work has appeared in journals like *LIT Magazine*, *Literary Mama*, and *In-scape*.

claudia barnett recently worked with Venus Theatre Company to develop her play *Another Manhattan* for a staged reading at the Kennedy Center. She teaches playwriting at Middle Tennessee State University.

carolyn biemer My goal is to go to medical school but sometimes science gets tedious. I love it when I get out of a chem lab and go straight to a poetry class. Gotta mix it up.

kate bradley is an alumnus of Santa Clara currently pursuing degrees in Public Health and Medicine. After graduating from SCU, she spent four months traveling the world and photographing 14 countries and countless cultures. She would like to thank her boyfriend Mikhail and friend Shelley for their encouragement and passion for travel.

chris caruso is pursuing a MFA at Rutgers Newark. He survives by working as a substitute teacher and lives in a cabin by an empty lake in New Jersey. His free time is spent studying DADA and contemporary Avant-garde poetics.

carol collins escaped her high-tech management job to become a Studio Art student at Santa Clara University. She loves art, kung fu, food, and traveling by motorcycle with her husband.

rick coonrod teaches writing at Boise State University where he is a MFA student. His work appears in *Dark Horizons*, *Breadcrumb Scabs*, the *Birmingham Arts Journal*, and other places. He wears jean shorts because they totally rock!

wendy crockett was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. She holds a BA in Fine Arts from the University of California Santa Cruz and her MFA in Photography from San Jose State University. Her work has been exhibited in Iceland and in the United States. When she is not visiting Iceland, she teaches photography in the San Francisco Bay Area.

thad devassie's work has appeared in *Poetry East*, *New York Quarterly*, *Nano Fiction*, *Sentence*, and *Fifty-two Stories* among others. A lifelong Ohioan, he runs a communications-consulting firm in Columbus.

benjamin drahmann is a Junior English Major at Santa Clara University. He enjoys writing fiction, playing guitar and taking long walks at night.

veronica eng is a graduate of Santa Clara University. She is an avid daydreamer of fairy tale macabre and nature lover.

kellie flint is a SCU alumni now living and working in Santa Cruz, California. She plans to attend a Masters Fine Arts program in the Fall of 2011. Kellie hopes that one day she will have the opportunity to teach painting at the university level.

veronica garcia is a Junior double Major in Communications and Studio Art. She hopes to continue to study and gain more expertise in different styles of graphic design and computer enhanced digital photography.

john haggerty is a former software engineer living in San Mateo, California. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Confrontation*, *High Desert Journal*, *The MacGuffin*, *Opium Magazine*, *Santa Monica Review*, *Vestal Review*, and *War, Literature & the Arts*, among others. His short story, *Ghost Lights*, was a runner-up for the 2007 Bridport Prize. He is currently at work on a novel.

kelsey inouye is a senior majoring in English and psychology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, where she is also a copy editor for the *Hawaii Review*. This is her first publication.

peggy kincaid studies poetry at CSU Sacramento. Her poems have appeared in *Calaveras Station* and *American River Review*.

katie larkin is a Santa Clara Alumni living in San Francisco. The work of Edward Weston was the inspiration for this photograph. To see more by the artist go to klarkinphotography.blogspot.com

annamarie leon is a senior studio art and art history double major at Santa Clara University. Working primarily in printmaking and sculpture, her current work seeks to explore the universally restrictive natures of fear and insecurity and their impact on the individual.

patrick lydon is a member of the Santa Clara University class of 2012 majoring in Studio Art and Art History. He is skilled in variety of mediums, but chooses to place an emphasis on oil painting. He enjoys surfing and normally resides in Laguna Niguel, California.

john o'reilly lives in Sonoma California. His work has been published or accepted for publication in the Red River Review, the Oklahoma Review, and on the door of his refrigerator.

armando portillo is a senior at Santa Clara University and will graduate as a Studio Art major with a minor in Latin American Studies. His current work focuses on portraiture and the figure, whether it be in drawing, painting, or ceramic sculpture.

melina alexa ramirez is a Studio Art Major and Religious Studies Minor at Santa Clara University. She likes animals, pretty clothes, and keeping it real.

james robison has published many stories in The New Yorker and elsewhere, has won a Whiting Grant and a Rosenthal Award from The American Academy of Arts and Letters.

craig scoffone is both a commercial and fine art photographer, and has a studio based in San Jose, California. His fine art work ranges from painterly landscapes primarily taken in and around Santa Clara County, to sculptural nudes. His work has been published and exhibited both in this country and around the world. His work can be seen at his studio's website, www.Scoffone-Studios.com

shoshauna shy is the author of four poetry collections, the most recent of which won an Outstanding Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Library Association. She is also the founder of the Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf program.

eric tseng is currently a Psychology Major at Santa Clara University.

julia weber is a MFA student in Photography at San Jose State University. Her work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions throughout the Bay Area.

katherine white thinks. Therefore, she is.

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